

The WIFE of BATH, &c.

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IN Bath once dwelt a wanton wife,
Of whom great Sanquer mention makes,
She liv'd a most licentious Life,
And chief was thought 'mongst female Rakes.
But Death did come for all her cracks,
When years were spent and days out-driv'n,
When suddenly she sickness takes,
Deceas'd forthwith and went to heav'n;
But as she walked on the way,
There followed her a certain guide,
And kindly to her he did say,
Where mean you, Dame, for to abide,
I know that you're the Wife of Bath,
And fain would have you do no wrong,
For I'm your friend and would be lothe,
That you should pass that narrow throng;
This road is broader, go with me,
For very pleasant is the way,
I'll bring you then where you would be,
Go with me, Dame, say me not nay.
She look'd at him and then did speare,
I pray thee tell to me thy name,
Shew me the way how you came here:
To tell to me, it is no shame.
Is that a favour about thy neck,
Or what is that upon thy side,
Is it a bag or silver sack,
What are you then, where do you bide?
I was a servant unto Christ,
And Judas likewise is my name;
I know you by your cloven foot,
Forsooth indeed you are to blame.
Your master did you not betray,
And hang'd yourself when you had done?
Where e'er you bide I will not stay,



Go from me, knave, let me alone,
 Whate'er I be I'll be your guide;
 Because you know not well the way;
 If you but once in me confide,
 I'll do all friendship that I may,
 What wou'd you me, where do you dwell,
 I have no will to go with thee,
 I fear it is some lower cell,
 I pray thee therefore let me be:
 This is a stormy night and cold,
 I'll bring you to a right warm inn,
 If you'll be forward and be bold,
 And mend your pace till we get in.
 I fear your inns will be too warm,
 For too much hotness is not best;
 Such hotness there may do me harm,
 And keep me from my wish'd-for rest.
 I know your way is unto hell,
 For you are none of the Eleven,
 Go haste you then unto your cell,
 For my way's only unto heaven.
 That way is then by gates of hell,
 If you intend therefore to go,
 Good dame I will you not compel,
 But I will go with you also:
 Then down they went a right steep hill,
 Where smoke and darkness did abound,
 With pitch and sulphur burning still,
 With yells and cries the hills resound:
 The Fiend himself came to the gate,
 And ask'd at him where he had been,
 Do you not know and have forgot,
 Seeking this wife could not be seen,
 Said he, would you be here good Dame,
 I pray you tell to me your name?
 The Wife of Bath, since that you spear,
 But to come in I were to blame.

I will not have you here good dame,
 For you are mistress of the flyting,
 If once within these gates you come,
 We'll all be troubl'd with your biting.
 Commer go back and let me be,
 Here are too many of this rout,
 For women lewd like unto thee,
 I cannot turn my foot about.
 Sir thief indeed I shall bide out,
 For gossip was I ne'er to thee,
 For to come in I'm not so stout,
 So of my biting you'll be free.
 But, Lucifer, what's that to thee?
 Hast thou no water in this place,
 Thou looks so black, it seems to me,
 Thou never wash thy ugly face.
 If we had water for to drink,
 We would not care for washing then,
 Into these flames and filthy stink,
 We burn with fire unto the doom.
 Upbraid me now no more good Dame,
 For first when I heard of your name,
 I knew you had such words in store,
 As would make the Devil to think shame,
 Sir thief, thou art not flyting free,
 If I had time for to abide,
 Once you was well but may think shame,
 Lost heaven for rebellious pride.
 Who traitor-like fell with the rest,
 Because you would not be content,
 And now of blefs are dispossefs'd,
 Without all grace for to repent.
 Thou mad'st poor Eve for to consent
 To eat of the forbidden tree,
 Which we poor daughters may lament,
 And makes us almost like to thee;

But God be blest who past thee by,
 And did a Saviour provide,
 For Adam's whole posterity,

All those who do in him confide.

Adieu, false friend, I may not bide,
 With thee I may no longer stay,
 My God in death he was my guide,
 O'er hell I'll get the victory.

Then up the hill the poor wife went,
 Opprest with stinking flames and fear,
 Weeping right fore with great relent,
 For to go else she wist not where.

A narrow way with thorns and briers,
 And full of mires was her before;
 She sigh'd oft with sobs and tears,

The poor wife's heart was wondrous fore.

Tir'd and torn she went on still,

Sometimes she sat and sometimes fell,

Until she came to an high hill,

And then she looked back to hell.

When that she had climb'd up the hill,

Before her was a goodly plain,

Where she did rest and wept her fill,

Then rose unto her feet again.

Her heart was glad, the way was good,

Up to the hill she hied in haste,

The fields were fair where that she stood,

The flowers were pleasant to her taste,

There then she spied Jerusalem,

On Sion's mount where that she stood,

Adorn'd with gold like to the sun,

This silly soul was then right glad,

The ports were pearls shining bright,

Glorious it was for to behold,

With precious stones gave such a light,

The walls were of transparent gold,

High were the walls, the gates were shut,
 And long she thought for to be in;
 But then, for fear of biding out,
 She knocked hard and made some din.
 To knock and cry she did not spare,
 Till father Adam did her hear.
 Who's that, said he, that knocks so fast,
 Heaven cannot well be won by war.
 The wife of Bath since that you spear,
 Hath stood these two hours at your gates :
 Go back, said he, and rap no more,
 Here may no sinners entrance get.
 Adam, quoth she, I will be in,
 In spite of all such churls as thee ;
 Thou was the original of all sin,
 For eating the forbidden tree,
 For which thou art not flyting free,
 But for thy foul offences stead,
 Adam went back and let her be,
 Looking as if his nose did bleed ;
 Then Mother Eve did at him spear,
 Who was it there that made such din :
 Said he a woman would be here,
 For me I durst not let her in,
 Eve said I will go ask her will,
 Her company I would have fain,
 But aye she cried and knocked still,
 And in no ways would she refrain ;
 Daughter, said Eve, you would do well,
 To come again another time ;
 Heaven's not won by sword or steel,
 For none that's guilty of a crime :
 Mother, said she, the fault is thine,
 That knocking here so long I stand,
 The thing you did was worse than mine ;
 If you would rightly understand,

You was the cause of all our sins,
 Wherein we're born and conceiv'd,
 Our miseries thou didst begin,
 By thee thy husband was deceiv'd.
 So Eve went back where Noah was,
 And told him all how she was blam'd
 Of her first sin and great trespass,
 Whereof she was so much sham'd.
 Then said Noah I will go down,
 And will forbid her that she knock.
 Go back, said he, you drunken loon,
 You're none of the celestial flock:
 Noah, quoth she, hold ye your peace;
 While I drank ale you did drink wine,
 Discovered it was to thy disgrace,
 When ye was drunk like to a swine;
 If I was drunk I learn'd at thee,
 For thou'rt the father, and the first
 That others taught, and likewise me,
 To drink, whereas we had no thirst.
 So Noah in haste he turned back,
 And told the Patriarch Abram then,
 How that the carlin did so crack,
 And all his deeds how she did ken.
 Abram, quoth she, will ye but spear,
 I hope you are not flyting free;
 You of your life had such a care,
 Deny'd your wife and made a lie;
 I pray thee therefore let me be,
 For I repent of all my sins,
 If you'll but open the door to me,
 And let me quietly come in.
 Abram went back to Jacob then,
 And told his nephew how he sped,
 How that of her he nothing wan;
 He thought the carlin was right mad:
 Then down came Jacob through the close,

And said go backwards down to hell;
 Jacob, said she, I know thy voice,
 That gate pertains best to thyself;
 Of thy old trumperies I can tell;
 With two sisters you led your life,
 And the third part of the tribes twelve
 You got with maids besides your wife;
 And stole your father's venison,
 Only by fraud your brother frae,
 Gave ye him not for venison
 A kid instead of a baken rae.
 Jacob himself was tickled so,
 He went to Lot where he was lying,
 And to the gate pray'd him to go,
 To staunch the carlin of her crying:
 Lot said, fair dame, make less ado,
 And come again another day.
 Old harlot-carle, and drunkard, too,
 Thou with thy own two daughters lay,
 Of thy untimely seed, I say,
 Proceeded never good but ill:
 Poor Lot for shame he stole away,
 And let the carlin crack her fill.
 Then Moses meekly rose at last,
 To pacify the carlin then;
 Good dame, said he, knock not so fast,
 Your knocking will not let you ben.
 Good Sir, said she, I am aghast,
 Whene'er I look you in the face,
 If that your laws till now had last,
 I'm sure that I had ne'er got grace:
 But Moses now, Sir, by your leave,
 Altho' in heav'n you be possessed,
 For all you saw did not believe;
 But you in Horeb there transgress'd,
 Wherefore by all it is confess'd,
 You got but once the land to see,

And in the mount was put to rest,
 And buried there where you did die,
 Then Moses meekly turned back,
 And told his brother Aaron there,
 How that the carlin did so crack,
 And in no wise would him forbear,
 Then Aaron said I will not swear,
 But I'll conjure her as I can,
 And I will make her to forbear.
 So that she shall not rap again;
 Then Aaron said you whorish wife,
 Go get you gone and rap no more,
 With idols you have led your life;
 For that you shall repent it sore.
 Good Aaron, priest I know thee well,
 The golden calf you may remember,
 Which made the people plagues to feel,
 This is recorded of thee ever.
 Thy priesthood now is nothing worth,
 Christ is my only priest, and he's
 My Lord, who will not hold me forth,
 I shall be in, despite of thee.
 Then up starts Sampson at the length,
 And to the gate apace comes he,
 To drive away the Wife by strength,
 But all in vain it would not be.
 Sampson, quoth she, the world may see
 Thou wast a judge that prov'd unjust,
 The gracious gifts which God gave thee,
 Thou lost them by licentious lust:
 From Delilah, thy own wicked wife,
 Thy secrets chief could not refrain;
 She daily sought to take thy life,
 Thou lost thy fight when thou was slain.
 Thought thou was strong, it was in vain
 To hunt with harlots here and there;
 So Sampson turned back again,

And with the Wife would deal nae mare.
 Then said King David make less ado,
 We all are troubled with your cry :
 David, quoth she, how came you here,
 You might bide out as well as I;
 Thy deeds no Ways thou canst deny,
 Is not thy sin far worse than mine,
 Who with Uriah's wife did ly,
 And caus'd him to be murder'd syne.
 Then Judith said who's there that knocks,
 And to our neighbours gives these notes :
 Madam, quoth she, let be your mocks,
 I came not here for cutting throats :
 I am a sinner full of blots,
 Yet thro' Christ's blood I shall be clean;
 If you and I were judg'd by votes,
 The thing you did was worser done.
 Then said the sapient Solomon
 Thou art a sinner all men say,
 Therefore our Saviour, I suppose,
 The heav'nly entrance will deny.
 Remember, quoth she, the latter days,
 What idol Gods thou didst upset,
 And was so lewd in Venus plays,
 Thou didst thy Maker quite forget.
 Then Jonah said, fair dame, content ye,
 If ye intend to come to grace,
 Ye must do penance and repent ye,
 Ere you can come within this place.
 Jonah, quoth she, how stands the case,
 How came you here to be with Christ,
 How dare you look him in the face,
 Considering how you brake his trust;
 At God's errand you him withstood,
 And held his counsel in disdain;
 The raven's message ye play'd him,

And brought no message back again.
 With mercy thou was not content,
 When that the Lord he did them spare,
 Although the city did repent,
 It grieved thee, thy heart was sore.
 Hold ye your tongue, and speak no more,
 Go back again into the whale,
 For now my heart is also sore;
 But yet I hope I shall prevail:
 Then Jonah said, crack on your fill,
 For here I may no longer tarry,
 You knock as long as e'er you will,
 And go into the ferry farry.
 Jonah, said she, ye do miscarry,
 As I have done in former time,
 You're not St. Peter nor St. Mary,
 Your blot's as black as e'er was mine.
 So Jonah then he was ashamed,
 Because he was not flyting free,
 Of all his faults she had him blam'd;
 He left the gates and let her be—
 Saint Thomas then I counsel thee,
 Go speak unto yon wicked wife,
 She shames us all, and as for me,
 Her like I never heard in life;
 Then Thomas said you make such strife
 When ye are out, and mickle din,
 If you were in, I'll lay my life,
 No peace the saints would get within.
 It is your trade for to be flyting,
 Still in a fever as one raves,
 No marvel though you wives be biting,
 Your tongues are made of aspen leaves.
 Thomas, quoth she, keep in your tants,
 Ye play the pickthank I perceive,
 Though ye be brother among the saints,
 An unbelieving heart you have,
 Ye brought the Lord unto the grave,
 But would no more with him remain,
 And was the last of all the leve
 That did believe he rose again;
 There might no doctrine do thee good,
 No miracles made thee confide,
 Till ye beheld Christ's wounds and blood,
 And put your hand into his side,
 Wast thou not daily with him taught,
 And saw the wonders that he wrought,
 But blest are they that do confesse,
 And do believe, yet saw him not.

Thomas, quoth she, will ye but spear,
 If that my sister Magdalene
 Will come to me, if she be here,
 For comfort sure you give me none.
 He was right blithe and turned back,
 And thanked God that he was gone;
 He had no will to hear her crack,
 But told it Mary Magdalen.
 When that she heard her sister's mocks,
 Unto the gate she comes with speed,
 And said to her whose there that knocks,
 It's I the Wife of Bath indeed.
 Said she, good sister, you must stand
 Till you be tried by tribulation:
 Sister, quoth she, give me your hand,
 Are we not both of one vocation,
 It is not through your occupation,
 That you are placed so divine,
 My faith is fixed in Christ's passion,
 My soul shall be as safe as thine.
 So Mary then she went away,
 The carlin made her so aham'd,
 She had no will for such a guest,
 To lose her pains and so be blam'd.
 Now good St. Paul, said Magdalene,
 For that you are a learned man,
 Go and convince this woman then,
 For I have done all that I can.
 Then went the good Apostle Paul
 To put the wife in better tune;
 Wash off the filth that fills thy soul,
 Then shall heaven's gates be opened soon.
 Remember Paul what thou hast done,
 For all the Epistles thou didst compile,
 Though now thou sittest up above,
 Thou persecuted Christ a while.
 Woman, he said, thou art not right,
 That which I did I did not know,
 But thou didst sin with all thy might,
 Although the preachers did thee show
 St. Paul, she said, it is not so,
 I did not know so well as ye,
 But to my Saviour I will go,
 Who will his favour shew to me.
 You think you are of flying free,
 Because you was wrapt up above,
 But yet it was Christ's love to thee,
 And matchlessnes of his dear love.

But Paul, she says, let Peter come,
 If he be lying let him rise,
 To him I will confess my sins,
 And let him quickly bring the keys.
 Too long I stand, he'll let me in,
 For here I may no longer tarry,
 Then shall ye all be out of din,
 For I must speak with good St. Mary.
 Then good Apostle discontent
 Right suddenly he turned back,
 For he did very much repent,
 To hear the carlin proudly crack.
 Paul says, good brother now arise,
 And make an end of all this din,
 And if so be ye have the keys,
 Open and let the carlin in.
 Then 'possie Peter rose at last,
 And to the gate with speed he hies,
 Carlin, said he, ye knock so fast,
 You cumber Mary with your cries.
 Peter, she said, let Christ arise,
 And grant me mercy in my need,
 For why, I ne'er deny'd him thrice,
 As thou thyself has done indeed.
 Ye carlin bold, What's that to thee,
 I got remission for my sin,
 It cost many a tear to me,
 Before I entred here within.
 It will not be thy mickle din
 Will cause heaven's gates op'ned to be,
 You must be purified of sin,
 And of all faults must be made free.
 But Peter then no thanks to thee,
 That so ye were rid of your fears,
 It was Christ's gracious look, I trow,
 That made thee weep these bitter tears.
 The gates of mercy is not clos'd,
 I may get mercy as well as ye
 It is not so as ye suppos'd,
 I will be in, in spite of thee.
 But Peter said it is too late,
 You should have mourned upon earth,
 Repentance now is out of date,
 It should have been before thy death :
 Then mightest thou have turned wrath
 To mercy then, and mercy got,
 But now the Lord is very lothe,
 And all thy crys not worth a jot.

Ah Peter then what shall I do,
 Hell will not have me as I hear,
 Shall I despair of mercy too,
 No, no I'll trust in mercy dear :
 And if I perish here I'll stay,
 And never go from heavens bright,
 I'll ever hope and always pray,
 Until I get my Saviour's light.
 Indeed I think you now are right,
 If you had faith you could come in,
 Importune then, with all your might,
 Faith is the feet wherewith you came ;
 It is the hands will hold you up,
 But a weak faith will not presume,
 It will make you sink and be aghast,
 Strongly believe or ye're undone.
 But Peter then what's that to thee,
 Had you such faith, did it abound,
 When that ye walked on the sea,
 Was ye not like for to be drown'd.
 Had not our Saviour helped thee,
 Who came and took thee by the hand,
 So can my Lord do the like to me,
 And bring me to the promis'd land.
 Is my faith weak, yet he is strong,
 The same and ever shall remain,
 His mercy lasts, and his good-will,
 To bring me to his flock again.
 He will me help and me relieve,
 And will increase my faith also,
 If I can weakly but believe,
 For from this place I'll never go.
 Peter, she said, I do appeal,
 From Moses and from thee also,
 With thee and him I can't prevail,
 But to my Saviour now I'll go.
 Then at the last the Lord arose,
 Environ'd with his Angels bright,
 And to the wife in haste he goes,
 Desired her soon pass out of sight.
 O Lord, she said, now do me right,
 But not according to my sin,
 Hast thou not promis'd day and night,
 When sinners knocks to let them in.
 Said he, thou wrests the Scriptures wrong,
 The night is come thou spent the day,
 In whoredoms thou hast lived long,
 And to repent thou didst deny.

Still my commandments thou abus'd,
 And vice committed busily :
 Since thou my mercy then refus'd,
 Go down to hell eternally.
 O Lord, my soul doth testify,
 That I have spent my time in vain,
 O make a wand'ring sheep of me,
 And bring me to thy flock again.
 Thinks thou there is no counts to crave,
 For all the gifts in thee were planted,
 I gave thee beauty above the lave
 A poignant wit thou never wanted.
 Master, said she, it must be granted
 My sins are great, give me contrition :
 The forlorn son when he repented
 Obtain'd his father's full remission.
 I spar'd my judgment many times,
 And sp'ritual pastors did thee send,
 But thou renew'd thy former crimes,
 Ay more and more me to offend.
 O Lord, she said, I do amend,
 Lamenting for my former vice,
 The poor thief at the latter end,
 For one word went to paradise.
 The thief heard never of my preaching,
 My heavenly precepts or my laws,
 But thou was daily at my teaching,
 Both heard and saw, and yet misknows.
 Master said she, the Scripture shews,
 The Jewish woman that play'd the lown,
 Conform unto the Jewish laws,
 Was brought to thee to be put down
 Yet ne'ertheless thou let'st her go,
 And made the Pharasees afraid.
 Indeed, says Christ, it was just so,
 And then my bidding was obey'd.
 Woman, said he, I may not cast
 The children's bread to dogs like thee ;
 Altho' my mercy still doth last,
 Yet mercy there is none for thee.
 But, loving Lord, may I presume,
 Poor worm, that I may speak again.
 The dogs for hunger were undone,
 And of the crumbs they were right fain,
 Grant me one crumb then that does fall
 From thy blest children's table, Lord,
 That I may be refresh'd withal,
 It will me help enough afford.

The gate of mercy now is clos'd,
 And thou canst hardly now come in;
 It is not so as ye suppos'd,
 For ye are sick in deadly sin.
 'Tis true indeed my Lord, most meek,
 My sores and sickness I do feel,
 But thou the lame didst truly lead,
 That lay long at Bethesda's pool.
 Of many that thee never sought,
 Like to the poor Samaritan,
 Whom thou into thy fold hast brought,
 Even as thou didst the widow of Nain.
 Most gracious God didst thou bid
 All that are weary come to thee,
 Behold I come even overlaid
 With sin, have mercy upon me.
 The issues of thy soul are great,
 Thou art both leprous and unclean,
 To be with me thou art unfit,
 Go from me then, let me alone.
 Let me thy garments only touch,
 My bloody issue shall be made whole,
 It will not cost thee very much
 To save a poor distressed soul.
 Speak thou the word I shall be whole,
 One look of thee will do me good,
 O save, I pray, my silly soul,
 Bought with thine own most precious blood.
 Let me alone, none of my blood
 Was ever shed for such as thee.
 It was my mercy, patience good,
 That from damnation made thee free.
 It is confess'd thou hadst been just,
 Although thou had condemned me;
 But, Oh! thy mercy still doth last,
 To save the soul that trusts in thee.
 Then let me not condemned be,
 Most humbly Lord I thee request,
 Of sinners all now pity me,
 So much the more my praise shall last.
 Thy praising me is not perfect,
 My saints shall praise me evermore,
 In sinners I have no delight,
 Such sacrifice I do abhor.
 Then she unto the Lord did say,
 At the footstool of thy grace I lay,
 Sweet Lord, my God, say me not nay,
 For if I perish, here I'll die.

Poor silly worm then speak no more,
 Thy faith, poor soul, hath saved thee
 Enter, go in unto my glor',
 And rest to all eternity.
 How soon our Saviour these words said,
 A long white robe to her was given,
 And then the angels did her lead,
 Forthwith within the gates of heav'n.
 A laurel crown set on her head,
 Spangl'd with rubies and with gold,
 A right white palm she likewise had,
 Glorious it was for to behold.
 Her face did shine like to the sun,
 Like threads of gold her hair hung down,
 Her eyes like lamps unto the moon,
 Of precious stones rich was her crown.
 Angels and saints did welcome her,
 The heav'nly choirs did sing, rejoice,
 King David with his harp was there,
 The silver bells gave a great noise;
 Such music and such melody,
 Was never heard, nor likewise seen,
 When this poor saint was plac'd on high,
 And of all sin made freely clean.
 But when that she was thus possess'd,
 And looked back on all her fears,
 And how she was come to her rest,
 Freed from her sins and all her tears,
 Off from her head she takes the crown,
 Giving all praise to Christ on high,
 And at his feet she laid it down,
 For that the Lamb had made her free,
 Now doth she sing triumphantly,
 And shall rejoice for evermore
 O'er death and hell victoriously,
 With lasting pleasures evermore.
 Of the Wife of Bath I make an end,
 And do these lines with this conclude,
 Let none their lives in sin now spend,
 But watch and pray, be doing good.
 Despondent souls do not despair,
 Repent, and still believe in Christ,
 His mercy that lasts evermore,
 Will save the soul that in them trusts.

F I N I S.

